Final Synopsis of the Thesis

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An Ecofeminist Reading of Selected American Novels

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Chapter I

Introduction

This study has dealt with the theory of ecofeminism and its application to some selected works of American novelists. Initially, an effort is made to make a brief study of the chief critical theories of the 20th century. This study will help to show the current position of ecofeminism and how it has gained importance in literary studies. In this chapter I would also make a brief review of the critical work that I have consulted for this study.

The term *ecofeminism* is derived literally as well as ideologically from an integration of ecology and feminism. The term was first coined by the French writer, Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in her book *Le Feminisme ou La Mort*. In this book, she has addressed the women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet called earth. Ecofeminism regards the oppression of women and nature as interconnected. Ecofeminism considers that the patriarchal system is responsible for any kind of oppression inflicted on the earth. It eradicates gender discrimination, race discrimination and the discrimination of class. It also resists speciesism, heterosexism and ageism. It comes forward as well to protect the animals and marginalized people on the earth. The theory of ecofeminism is based on deep ecology and environmental justice movement which motivate one to fight against all social inequalities. Ecofeminism has also suggested some proposals to solve the environmental problems.

At the end of the chapter, a brief biographical sketch of the selected writers and my argument for selecting their work for this study is also included. The selected novels for this study are as follows:

1 The Country of the Pointed Firs by Sarah Orne Jewett.

2 The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Le Guin.

3 The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison.

4 Ceremony by Leslie Marmon Silko.

5 Prodigal Summer by Barbara Kingsolver.

6 Power by Linda Hogan.

Chapter II

Ecofeminism in Linda Hogan's *Power* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*.

This chapter critically analyses Linda Hogan's *Power* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* through ecofeministic perspectives. These novels are about the link between human beings and nature in general and women and nature in particular. The authors are aware of the degradation of women and the non-human world. The authors also portray the degradation as caused by the patriarchal system which created an adverse impact not only on women's life but also on the life on the planet. This chapter has explored how both the novels resist classism, racism and gender discrimination. Both the authors convey their strong hope to free women and non-human world from the different types of oppression. They expect that women, nature and indigenous people not be treated as slaves of the dominant group of people.

Power shows the deep connection of women with nature. Ama and Omishto are the two main female characters of the novel. Ama loves animals. Ama provides shelter to the snakes during the storm. To Ama, snakes also need shelter from the rain. Ama offers respect to the animals. She treats them equally, as if they are just as important as another life. The other female characters also behave with the animals in the same manner as Ama does. The novel has been set in the South Florida region where the panthers are going to be extinct. The female characters, Ama and Omishto try to save the animals in their region. It shows how women are connected with nature very deeply.

Women in *Power* also practise the non-exploitative use of natural resources. They take care of land as they do of a child. Ama stays in a simple house .She uses palmetto fronds on the roof of the house to keep the place cool.It shows that how women make an adjustment with nature. It proves that Ama's house is close to the Taiga civilization .There are plants and trees around Ama's house .The small hut is the real satiation for Ama. The benefit of the hut is that after any cause of damage it can be built quickly anywhere. Ama's hut is more integrated with nature. The women character's natural connection shows cultural ecofeminism in the novel. Cultural ecofeminism also affirms the domination of women and nature by the patriarchal society. The women, nature and animals are exploited by the dominant American androcentric society. Linda Hogan points out how the birds and animals are haunted as a part of sport. Many panthers are killed in hunting and others are killed in the process of modern scientific development. The new technological development has had a bad effect on the lives of animals. Due to pollution panthers are all diseased and they starve accordingly. They are killed in the road accidents so their number of strength has been decreased. It shows that the female characters take efforts to save the lives of animals. This proves that women are coming forward to save the planet. The ecofeminist movement also focuses on the various issues that are related to ecology. The novel also throws light on the sexual harassment of women. But Linda Hogan proves that though the women are dominated by the mainstream of society, they are very powerful to save the earth. They have traditional herbal knowledge about various plants. Linda Hogan has shown the matriarchal system in the novel. It gives the equal treatment to men and women. Women in the novel also protect the myth of their indigenous culture.

In *Power* it is the attempt of the writer to create a society which would be free from different types of oppression. Besides this, it has been seen that indigenous culture goes with ways of nature. Therefore, it is an urgent need to protect the indigenous culture. *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko also reflects some aspects of ecofeminism. The female characters such as Ts'eh, Night Swan and Betonie's grandmother are very deeply connected with the ways of nature. The central character is

Tayo that belongs to Laguna Paubelo community and joins the army but is exploited by the white culture everywhere. Tayo comes in contact with Ts'eh, a woman from his own community. She transforms his life through storytelling and sexuality. She harmonizes his masculine and feminine side. At the beginning, he is a misogynist but Ts'eh leads him to recognize the female power and women's real worth. He begins to respect not only the women but the animals and other non-human world. Ecofeminsism teaches people to give respect to nature. What is followed there would be ecological balance on the earth. The women characters have good knowledge about the use of natural resources properly. They make their houses from the wood instead of building the houses from the use of sand and cement. The women such as Ts'eh have good knowledge of the herbal uses of plants. She plays the role of medicine a woman in the novel.

Silko also shows the subjugation of both women and animals. Laura is sexually harassed by the white people. The racial exploitation and class difference lead her towards the profession of prostitution. She is a victim of physical violence as well. *Ceremony* reveals how the patriarchal American society is responsible for bringing injustice to women.

Helen Jean, being black, is rejected at many job interviews and she is offered the job of cleaning the theatre for seventy five cents an hour. The amount is inadequate to pay the rent of her room. At the place of her job, she is sexually harassed by her boss. The racial hatred leads her towards the way of prostitution.

Silko has shown that Native American women do not have equal access to wealth. They are also the victims of sexual violence. They are suppressed by the mainstream of American society. Patriarchal authority always legalizes their supremacy over women through the social, political, and economic institutions.

The destruction of nature is also a prominent theme of the novel. The bomb made from uranium in the Laguna region destroyed the Japanese in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the people around Los Alamos. Tayo visits a secret laboratory where the bomb is made and he visits the spot where the test is taken. The incident creates awareness among the people about harmful effects of the nuclear bomb. The bomb explosion in various

parts of the world has proved that it has had very bad effects on the lives of human beings, animals and it destroys nature in a very strong way.

In this chapter, there is a discussion of how the aspects of ecofeminism have been reflected in both the novels. It also shows that the oppression through racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism is interlinked with each other. The patriarchal system runs all the oppressions on the earth. Therefore, it is the need of hour to follow the thoughts from ecofeminism and save the earth.

Chapter -III

Ecofeminist Vision in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

This chapter deals with the study of Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* from the ecofeministic perspective. This chapter has also focused on the relationship between women and nature. It has explored how the novelists reinvent the role of gender and how they eliminate gender discrimination and its binary oppositions. The study examines the thinking of female characters about the patriarchal system and the environment.

Barbara Kingsolver, in *Prodigal Summer*, expresses her love for the land. The women characters show a great amount of respect and understanding for the world around them. The lives of women revolve round the crops, wild life and weather of Appalachia Mountain. Deanna is the central female character in the novel. She lives in the Zebulon National Forest. Deanna is more comfortable when around the plants and flowers of the Zebulon Mountain. She has a deep feeling of love for animals. She can distinguish one carnivore from the other simply based on their tracks and the scent of their urine. When the birds sing around her, she can identify which bird is singing. In the early morning, Deanna listens to the songs of the birds. She is enchanted by the

melodious singing of the birds such as Carolina Chickaees and Vireo. She takes care of the Coyotes, a kind of American wolf. She is worried about Coyotes because they are going to be extinct. She resists the local farmers who kill the Coyotes. There are other female characters like Lusa and Nannie Rawley which are connected with nature. Lusa is a farmer who likes to grow and sell something that is truly useful to mankind. She resists growing tobacco in the field which is harmful to the human beings. She recommends the sweet corn to the other farmers.

Lusa learns about goat-farming and also guides the other farmers. Nannie Rawley protects the nectar of bees. She talks about the bees that are going to be extinct. She resists Garnett's action to fumigate the hives on the wall of the Church. Garnett wants to collect the honey by using chemicals but Nannie opposes him because she fears that it would kill a number of bees. She advocates that bees are the main part of the environment and help to keep ecological balance. The honey which they provide to the human beings is really useful for the good health of human beings. She also tries to save the Salamanders, a type of amphibian.

The women in *Prodigal summer* are more connected to nature. They are more aware of the ecological system. The women play a very significant role in protecting the nature. The deep connection of women with nature is part of cultural ecofeminism.

The Ecofeminsts have always raised their voice against the use of harmful chemicals and insecticides on the crops in the field. Garnett, one of the characters from the *Prodigal Summer*, sprays the insecticides on the crops. Nannie strongly opposes him and makes him recognize the bad effects of the insecticides on the body of women and animals particularly. She gets to know the readers how Nannie's child has had harmful side effects of the chemicals on his body. In the novel, the readers come to know that the high cost of chemical herbicides and insecticides has driven many farmers out of business. It has also caused cancer to some of the inhabitants in their own town named as Egg Fork.

Ecofeminism motivated women to throw their traditional label work and start to do any kind of work outside their confined range. In *Prodigal summer* women perform

the active roles in various fields. Deanna works as a forest officer and Lusa as a developed farmer. Nannie Rawley works in the field and develops a nice garden around her house. Women reproduce different types of food and sell them in the market. They study the market and crops properly.

As per the views of ecofeminism, Barbara focuses on the issue of gender discrimination. Jewell has two children, Crystal and Lowell .Crystal is a daughter who behaves like a boy. Jewell, the mother, is not ready to accept her male behaviour. But Lusa, another lady, comes forward to convince Jewell and tries to persuade her. Lusa convinces Jewell that gender is created by the society. Every person is the mixture of feminine and masculine qualities. Lusa resists the heterosexual role of Jewell and her husband.

The novel also brings to light the theme of destruction of nature. Ecofeminst raised their voice against the destruction of nature. In *Prodigal Summer* Kingslover has shown that the mountains are disappearing in the Appalachian region. In that region many coal companies extract the coal by removing the mountaintop and blasting the land .The families such as Garnett's log the American chestnut trees till their extinction. This attitude of the human beings is called as anthropocentric attitude. Ecofeminism is against the anthropocentric attitude. Under this attitude, human beings consider themselves superior to other species. It insists on the person to conquer nature and manipulate it for the special benefits of human beings. Kingsolver has shown the anthropocentric attitude in Garnett Walker.

The novel *Prodigal Summer* reflects the aspects of social ecofeminism. Women come out from their confined work and do the different kinds of jobs. The women resist the use of insecticides in their region. Nannie Rawley starts a movement against the use of chemicals and insecticides in the field. The women farmers start small markets in their area and resist the big market. The women overthrow the existing economic and social order.

The chapter also examines Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* from the ecofeministic perspective. The women of the novel are in harmony with nature. Mrs

Blackett, MrsTodd and Joanna perform a significant role in protecting nature. They prefer to live in the company of nature. They have good knowledge about environment, changing cycles and uses of plants. Mrs Todd offers natural remedies to the sick people. Joanna chooses the way of life as a hermit. She gets healing power from nature. Mrs Todd also prefers to stay in the company of nature. Women have the ethics of care. Mrs Todd and Mrs Blackett take care of the people, nature and animals. Mrs Todd is a herbalist who serves the community. The women characters behave like mother figures that care for others. Woman-utopia is also the theme of ecofeminism. Jewett has presented matrilineal society where women play a central role and handle the things quite properly. They give equal treatment to the men.

The novel also resists heterosexism. Mrs. Todd and the female narrator are intimate friends. It has been described that in the *cherry-picking scene* they come physically and emotionally very close. The narrator holds the hand of Mrs Todd tightly when they climb the hill and want to attend William's wedding .Their friendship not only shows genital relations but also need some emotional satisfaction. Mrs Todd and the narrator possess such an all-encompassing relationship. The two characters stand for the lesbian relationship. That time people do not accept lesbian relationships so Jewett tries to say that even such kind of relationship should be accepted.

In *Prodigal Summer* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, it has been observed that women are connected with nature. In both the novels women are independent and they take active part in business life. The patriarchal system tries to suppress women but they resist it. It has been found that women are against the use of insecticides and pesticides. It has been shown in the novel that these chemicals cause the dangerous diseases like cancer to the women. Women are more sensitive to the environmental problems. The chapter discusses how women play a very significant role in the production of the food and agricultural products.

Chapter IV

Ecofeminist Approach to Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Toni Morrison's The *Bluest Eye*

This chapter analyses ecofeminist aspects reflected in Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The chapter also shows how these writers have contributed to the growth of ecofeminism and how their work remains an important part of the ecofeminist dialogue.

Ursula Le Guin is an ecofeminist writer who tries to eradicate gender discrimination in her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. She presents an androgynous society in the novel. An androgyne is a non-binary gender identity. An androgyne is a person who has the characteristics of both male and female. Genly Ai is the sole representative of the earth and he goes to another planet named as Winter. It is also called as Gethen. His mission is to join the Gethenians of the world organization. Heis surprised to see the androgynous people on the planet. Le Guins's whole purpose in using androgyny is to eradicate sexual tensions of male dominance and female obedience.

Le Guin has presented different types of dualities in the novel. The patriarchal structure runs these dualities. All dualities create conflict and suffering in the world. Ursula in *The Left Hand of Darkness* has intended to deconstruct these dualities. She unites these dualities and makes a new thing which stands beyond duality. Ursula has tried to stress that duality is not the division but a relationship in which the terms are bound together. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin deconstructs dualities such as man/woman, self/other, light/dark, left/right, good and evil and so on.

The novel follows the aspect of ecofeminism which is but ecological preservation. The people of Gethen take care of the land. They are devoted to ecological preservation. There is the scientific and technological development but they do not disturb the environment. Their life style matches with their native environment. They have cars,

roads and big buildings but there is no competition for earning money. There is no profit motive behind their actions. Their houses are made from the wood and there is no use of cement and sand. Their wooden houses suit their natural environment. The ecofeminist message the readers get is that people should try to adapt to the environment by going with the ways of nature.

The novel also supports the ecofeminist adherence to the view of anti-militarism and vegetarianism.There is no military organization, no nuclear devices so they do not have the fear of *big war*. Ursula gives the message to follow the ways of anti-militarism.The novel also follows the ecofeminist view of vegetarianism. There is bitter cold on the planet. There are also animals on the planet but their diet is totally vegetarian. Le Guin has favoured the side of vegetarianism.

The Left Hand of Darkness is related to the radical ecofeminism. Le Guin tries to destroy the gender system in which women's oppression is rooted. The novel also breaks down the dualistic assumption from which gender categories are created. She has presented androgynous society wherein discrimination based on gender, sex, etc. is not observed. The ecofeminist aspects such as history, ecological preservation, vegetarianism and anti-militarism have been reflected in the novel.

Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* resists the patriarchal system and its media of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism. She has tried to show that black women are the victims of these media of oppression. The ecofeminists are concerned with the issues of environment, forests, globalization, water and farming but in addition they also deal with racism, sexism and classism.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison's emphasis is on racism. Toni Morrison shows how the standards of beauty of dominant culture affect the black women and how it destroys the self-image of the African female adolescents. In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola Breedlove is abused at home and also ridiculed at school because of her black skin which the white society equates with ugliness. Pecola Breedlove is affected most by the dominant culture's beauty standards. She is racially discriminated in her school and at the strawberry shop. She is insulted many times in the novel due to her black colour. Pecola

believes that if she possesses blue eyes, the cruelty in her life will be replaced by affection and respect. She will be loved by her parents and the other people in the society. Her wish for blue eyes leads her towards mental disorder. There are several other examples of racism that occur in the novel. African American men and women and children are the victims of racism. Toni Morrison reveals the bad effects of racism on the African American commune. The character of Claudia resists the white standards of beauty. She breaks the white doll which is the symbol of white skin. To Claudia, all are equal— no one is superior and inferior on this earth.

African Americans are also the victims of classism. In the novel, it has been shown that the ruling class is the white people. They subjugate black people in every field. The black people are deprived of various job opportunities. They are asked to do low-status jobs. The economic production and distribution go in the hands of ruling class; therefore, they deliberately suppress black people from their economic progress.

Sexism also reflects in *The Bluest Eye*. Black women are discriminated in their own community as well as outside it. The women are confined to the household work and not allowed to do the other type of works. The men also have a kind of aversion towards their women; therefore, women have no protection from the men of their own community. They are raped, sexually and physically abused by their own people as well as the white people in the society. Pecola is raped by her own father, Cholly. Darlene and Pauline are left alone by Cholly. Cholly considers woman made only for sexual pleasure. Morrison shows that women meet sexual violence, they are molested and left alone.

The Bluest Eye reflects the aspects of cultural ecofeminism. Women characters and animals are dominated by the mainstream of American society. Women are connected with nature. Claudia and her sisters plant the marigolds in the soil. It shows their love for plants. Morrison's reference to Pecola's menstruation cycle represents the Mother Earth in the novel. Cultural ecofeminists equal woman with Mother Earth. The woman gives birth just as the earth gives birth to the plants and it gives life to all other life forms. Woman not only gives birth to a child but is given to the work of nurturing, teaching, encouraging, comforting and healing it. Women worship nature as the Mother

Goddess. Nature has always remained a source of inspiration and empowerment to women. A cultural ecofeminist comprises an ethic of caring and connective human relationships.

The rape of Pecola and her menstruation represent cultural ecofeminism. In addition, many natural images are used to intensify the connection of women and nature. To cultural ecofeminists, human nature is grounded in human biology. But patriarchal system gives importance to gender which is socially constructed. Therefore, the connection between women and biological production turned upside down. But now it has become the source of women's empowerment and ecological activism. Women's biology and nature are celebrated as the sources of female power. This type of ecofeminism makes the people aware of the spirituality, nature and goddess worship. It celebrates the woman's body and organizes social actions against nuclear and pornographic subjects.

There are other ecofeministic aspects that have been discussed in the chapter: for example, how ecofeminism promotes for myth and indigenous culture, etc. Toni Morrison takes care of incorporating African American culture in the novel. She has focused on how these people love different types of music. The African American people like to sing a song with musical instruments. In The Bluest Eye there is the reference of Blues. Blues is the name given to the musical form and music genre of African American people originated in the end of the 19th century. She has celebrated an African myth in the novel. The ecofeminists always preserve the myth of indigenous people.

Chapter – V

Conclusion

The final chapter has pointed out the various issues of ecofeminism that have been discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter arrives at certain conclusions regarding the ecofeminist analysis of the novels. In all these novels, the ecofeminist aspects have been observed. The female characters are deeply connected with nature. They take care of the nature like a mother does of her child. Women, animals and nature are connected with each other. They are dominated by the patriarchal American society. The mainstream of American society also exploits the indigenous people. It has been found that this mainstream of society has threatened the earth itself. It has also been found that the oppression of the people through classism, racism, heterosexism and sexism is interlinked with one another. The result of this oppression has been found on the exploitation of non-human world. In order to stop the exploitation of the earth, there is the urgent need to abolish the patriarchal system in the American society. It has been found that nature is active; it sustains the earth therefore all the novelists agree that nature ought to be respected. All these factors have been re-examined via this chapter.

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